



UB: A MEMOIR

"UNCLE BOB" MEAD

SAMPLE CHAPTER

UB: A MEMOIR OF UNCLE BOB MEAD

In his memoir, Bob Mead, long-time resident of Haverhill, New Hampshire, describes his growing up in Pennsylvania and his adult life in New England's North Country, where he has lived with his wife Claire since the early 1970s. He is a retired math educator, a singer, a published author of math and science articles, and a constructor of word and logic puzzles.

I begin the book with my early childhood growing up with three siblings. Our visits to the corner store...

“Robin! Do you think the rain’ll hurt the rhubarb?” The question emanated from the velvety tenor voice of John Morici who, along with his wife, Katherine, “Kitty” Morici, owned and operated the corner grocery two doors from our house on Dorrance Street. It was a question that sounded to this eight-year-old like one an adult would ask another adult, so the first few times it was posed to me, I took it very seriously. Sometimes I’d muse a bit and say, “Maybe,” and other times, “Nah.”

I had no idea what rhubarb was or how much rain it required, but when I found out it was a plant, I began to calculate whether it may have had enough rain in the days prior to the question. Eventually, it just became our standard greeting. Claire makes a sweet rhubarb bread that I love, but eating rhubarb in any less refined state gives me frozen face, metal teeth, and possibly a mild case of lockjaw.

John’s regular exchange with brother Jerome went something like, “John, how much are these?” “They’re ten cents each but for you, Jerome, two for a quarter.” Jerome says he never fell for it.

Steve remembers taking a container of Dannon® up to the counter. “John, what’s yogurt?”
“Some women in Russia eat it, and live a long life!”



photo: Dwight Burdette

Our League ...

We no doubt played ball in the yard with other neighborhood kids and cousin Hop (Luke), at least until Laurie got in shape for the majors, but our league was just the four of us sibs, and the team rosters were fixed. Just like Mantle and Maris on the Yanks, and Aaron and Spahn on the Braves, it was Jerome and Steve versus Laurie and me. We played two games a day, and sometimes a morning - afternoon - nighttime triple-header. The grass simply disappeared for months at a time. Between games we’d hose down the dust on the field, copying what they do in the big leagues, but also in consideration of the laundry on lines in the neighborhood. If we lost balls on the roofs, we’d wrap a wad of newspaper in masking tape and use that for a ball – good for two-and-a-half innings sometimes.

Bob Sr. and a friend once built a playhouse for us in front of the big bush and about 18 inches away from Tony’s fence. I don’t remember completely how we adapted our ball games to it, but it reminds me now of a magical phrase that all parents of ballplayers should know. It’s a phrase that is legitimate – it actually exists in the rules of baseball – and it is a “peacemaker.” It stops rhabarbs before they get started. What if the ball rolls under the playhouse or between it and Tony’s fence? What if the fly ball lands in the sometimes blazing trash barrel out by the alley. OK parents, listen up – the phrase is “ground rule double.”

I follow with my college experiences ...

“There are 100 of you beginning the 5-year mathematics program. We project that, with dropouts and the changing of majors, five of you will complete the program.” You know ... I was deluded enough to think I’d be one of the five. And later ... There were nine integrals to

do. I looked at the first one, and I thought it may have been submitted by a Martian post-doc who did Calculus upside down.

And the Army ...

After three weeks in Limbo, Georgia, I finally received orders to serve in the 52nd Military Police Company, the Nickel-Deuce (for 52, in the vernacular) at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas. One of the sergeants at Fort Gordon had served there and assured me it was one of the nicest posts anywhere. I was given a week's leave, and took my first ever flights to get back to Philly. The first was a hop from Augusta to Atlanta. The next was an Eastern 727. I had a window seat, and as we took off, the pilot banked severely to my side. Praying that this was standard procedure, I had a great view looking straight down about a hundred feet, it seemed, on Atlanta's rooftop laundry lines. While I was in the service I got used to flying, even though two landings were much scarier than the takeoff just mentioned.

In Korea ...

... we had an electrical storm and the entire site went dark – fence line, HQ, and, horrors, the latrine lights too.

In a series of chapters I call “Music Makers,” you can “be our guest” at **North Country Chorus's** annual Madrigal Dinner, pictured below, described in words and in pictures.





You can help us navigate a longboat on a trip through the English canals ...

... the traffic comes from either folks who own boats and live on them, or from tourists like us. Guess which faction provides the hazards. Left: my wife Claire at the helm.

I also describe my great sorrows. They were losses – of a father to another woman, of a sister stricken with cancer, and of a mother who escaped these things via mental illness. In spite of life’s challenges, in the final group of chapters I call “The Good Life,” I celebrate my good fortune, the helping hands of others, and my determination to do good work.

In these stories you can accompany Claire and me on back-country walks ...

At times the breezes bring the agricultural smells of freshly mown hay, corn silage being rolled into the bunker, and at other times, the smell of what the cows do with these items.

We took many opportunities to travel abroad, both on tours with our chorus and on our own. In Barcelona, at 2 a.m. ...

... our hotel got visitors. You didn’t need to know any Spanish to interpret what was happening. What seemed like nine-inch stiletto heels clicked and clacked on the hard hallway floor.



Bob at the Alhambra fortress, Granada, Spain

You will learn about the joys of star-gazing in northern New Hampshire's dark skies, and possibly pick up some gardening tips. You'll find out the many other things that make me tick, especially math, teaching, learning, and solving and making puzzles.

What inspired my memoir? After the death of our sister Laurie at age 33, my brothers – Jerome 37 and Steve 35 – and I and our spouses got together for dinner and to share some family photos. I was the oldest in the group at age 39, which is not a wide margin of seniority, but I found that I could remember more details of our family history further back than either brother. When I turned 67, I determined to set down what I could remember of the earliest years for the benefit of my brothers, their children, and Laurie's children. My brothers and cousin Luke Hilgendorff provided helpful details. My editor Sylvia Field's suggestions helped my narrative become clearer and more fluid.

As I saw it, there were two main benefits to publishing this memoir in digital formats. Since music has ever been sweet to my ears and swimming in my head, I wanted to share some tunes, both classical and popular, via web links – hear [Marty Robbins](#), Patti Page, Tchaikovsky, and the [U.S. Navy Sea Chanters](#), to mention just a few. Other links provide information related to the stories. Another benefit was in doing our own layout of over 200 illustrations.



Looking across our valley from Vermont

Some folks in the region may have seen me performing with the North Country Chorus; or played a friendly set of tennis with me on the Haverhill courts behind Alumni Hall; or you may be one of over a thousand of my former students and tutees.

Whether or not you have any prior knowledge of me, I think you will enjoy my light conversational style and my comments on life's experiences. I hope you enjoy the journey. These stories are unique in only one way: I'm the one who lived them.



"Come sit the porch."